

## **Winter Learning Activities for Families: Six Activities to Do With Your High School Student**

High school students are entering the phase of “Who am I?” – and need to know that they can talk to you about their hopes and fears. They also are beginning to ponder and explore “life as an adult.”

Take advantage of your teen's "downtime" during winter break. Winter break can be an opportunity to connect, reconnect or better connect with your teenagers. How? Just by talking, listening and playing with them. It doesn't get much easier or more fun than that.

### **1. Set aside time to talk to your teens one-on-one.**

- What they want to do after high school?
- Do they know how to reach their goals?
- How are they doing in school?
- In what areas are they feeling most successful, and what's an area they feel is more challenging?

To help with this discussion, your teenager can begin doing the Learning Styles Inventory and Ability Profiler in their Individual Graduation Portfolio (see below). After completing these assessments, your teenagers can print out a report about their interests and college majors and careers that match those interests. Then, you can both discuss the results and next steps.

Your teens also can spend time looking up colleges and careers, and begin requesting information.

### **2. Get to know or become reacquainted with your child's friends.**

This is also a good time to ask your teens about their friends and interests. If possible, you might also want to meet some of their friends.

### **3. Get to know your 'online child'.**

While students are on break, they have more time to spend online or on the phone. Take some time to explore and understand what they're doing online, and spend some time directing them to some web-based activities that can positively impact their academic lives.

- Social media (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter), texting and gaming are integral parts of the lives of many children today. How much do you know about what your teens post online, what

materials they send and receive, and to whom they are talking? What you don't know can hurt your child.

- Take the time to: 1) get informed about issues of Internet safety; 2) talk to your teens about Internet safety; and 3) establish some Internet and online boundaries and the reason behind why they are important.

To learn about Internet safety, including the abbreviations kids use to communicate, you can visit [www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org). Under the “parents/guardians” section, look at “commonly used lingo” to learn the shorthand words used to communicate online and via text.

There are also sections for your teens as well. “Netsmartz kids” is designed for children in grades K-5. NS Teens is for middle school kids, and Real Life Stories is for older teens.

#### **4. Have ‘the talk’ about college and career.**

The IGP is a great online academic and career-planning resource available to all DCPS students in grades 6-12. The IGP provides students with information about their academic records and courses, and provides online tools to help students build skills and begin long-range planning for high school, college and careers.

Parents do not have their own logins; your child must provide you with a password.

- Go to [www.dcps.bridges.com/](http://www.dcps.bridges.com/)
- Students enter their portfolio name and password. Their portfolio name is DCPS followed by their student ID number. For example:

Portfolio Name: DCPS12345678

Initial Password: DCPS \*Your child will choose a new password once they login \*

All students can access their grades and a Learning Styles Inventory. High school students can access a course plan builder, college or career planners, aptitude tests, college finders, free PSAT and SAT test materials, and more.

After your teens complete sections of the IGP, they can print out copies of the results. Spend some time reviewing these results with your teenagers to learn about their study preferences and habits, ways they can strengthen some learning challenges, what goals they have set for themselves, and what they need to do to begin making these goals a reality.

***Parents/Guardians of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders:*** The TestGear section of the IGP can help prepare your teenagers for the upcoming SATs. The “College and Post Secondary” section also has information about the college admissions process and financial aid information. *The time you spend now reviewing these sections and gathering information will make the process easier in the long run.*

Additional information also can be found at the following sites:

Financial Aid Sites:

DC ONE APP - <https://dconeapp.dc.gov>. This is the common application for many colleges.

FAFSA – [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov). This site has information about applying for financial aid.

FinAid.org – [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org). This site provides a comprehensive guide to financial aid.

**Know How 2 Go:** [www.knowhow2go.org/](http://www.knowhow2go.org/). The site provides a general overview of college preparation for middle school and high school focusing on four key steps: 1) Be a pain; 2) Push yourself; 3) Find the right fit; 4) Put your hands on some cash. Go to the site for more information. This is a more general site and has information for high school students as well.

**Double the Numbers DC:** [www.doublethenumbersdc.org/](http://www.doublethenumbersdc.org/). Great resource to learn practical steps for DC students to access college. The site also is the home of DCPS-specific scholarship resources.

**College Results.org:** <http://www.CollegeResults.org>. This site provides analysis of colleges and universities and is a recommended resource to evaluate graduation rates for colleges in which you may be interested.

## 5. Be actively low key.

When possible, set aside time to turn off the TV, radio, videogames and cell phones and enjoy some “family time.” This may take the form of playing a game together or just talking. And sometimes it may involve awkward periods of silence. The purpose is to reinforce a time when you and your children can connect or re-connect.

## 6. Celebrate achievements and set goals.

Talk to your teenagers about school. Find out:

- What they love about school;
- What would they change about school; and
- What do they want to be when they grow up.

Establish and write down new goals for the remainder of the school year. Post them where everyone can see them.

- Congratulate them when they make progress.
- Encourage and support them when they face challenges.

## **Be Pleasantly Persistent**

You may get push back from your middle and high school students. They might say that talking to you is “weird” or “awkward” and want to know why you are asking them questions. This is a rite of passage for them and you. Keep trying. Despite what they say to you, children want to connect and spend time with their parents.

Having open communication with your teenagers and letting them know that they can count on you is one way to ensure that your teens will stay on the path to being healthy and successful adults.

**What other activities do you like to do with your children during the winter? Submit your ideas to <http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/winter> and we’ll share some of them on our website, Twitter and Facebook.**